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CONTEXTS AND REASONS FOR POST-WAR MIGRATION FROM UPPER SILESIA TO WEST GERMANY AND CHANGES IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF *AUSSIEDLERS* FROM POLAND

INTRODUCTION

During the Cold War, West Germany was a kind of promised land for many Polish citizens, offering a better life in freedom. This led, in a certain period, to mass emigration to the Federal Republic of Germany. Emigration on the ground of "German descent" was particularly attractive, as this way of legalising one's stay guaranteed fast German citizenship and support from the West German state in starting a new life.

From the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, emigration to West Germany changed the demographic landscape of Poland, especially in such regions as Upper Silesia, which saw a huge outflow among the native population. At the same time, workers recruited to work in industry came to the Upper Silesian Industrial Region from other parts of Poland. The emigration of native or autochthonous[1] people to West Germany took on dramatic proportions in the second half of the 1980s, when those emigrating were mainly of generations born many years after World War II – relatively young people, often with small children, and also enterprising and resourceful. For them, documents inherited from their ancestors were a ticket to a better, Western world, to prosperity and democracy. Unlike those leaving in earlier years, they usually did not know German, which they started to learn only after arriving in Germany, on language courses organised specially for *Aussiedlers*.

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[1] Analysing the statistics on emigration on grounds of "descent", Jan Korbel notes that: "All tables (…) support the argument that, even if counted with extreme caution and prudence, even if we take into account the mistakes and irregularities during verification, ethnic mobility, family divisions and the so-called re-Germanisation, it must be assumed that at least two-thirds of the total number of people who emigrated from Poland to West Germany for good by the end of the 1960s were people with verified German descent (and from so-called mixed families), including those not necessarily convinced of their Germanness and not always ethnically motivated"(J. Korbel, *Polska – Górny Śląsk – Niemcy. Polityczny bilans 50-lecia Poczdamu*, Opole 1995, p. 32). Bearing this context in mind, it should be assumed that the emigration to Germany in later times also included members of the local population who had inherited the right to German citizenship.

This paper focuses on several aspects – historical, social and political – related to the issue of Polish citizens leaving Upper Silesia and claiming German descent. It is also an attempt at a sociological reconstruction of the *Aussiedlers'* paths to and within Germany from the 1970s onwards.

It should be taken into account that since the exodus[2] of Polish citizens to the West, especially to the Federal Republic of Germany, both countries have undergone huge transformations. It is therefore interesting how people who emigrated to Germany during the previous regime or just after the watershed of 1989 see the changes in the Federal Republic of Germany, also in relation to the Polish systemic transformation: what were the reasons for their departure, what were their first impressions of Germany, and how do they view their decision to leave from today's perspective?

In this article, I deliberately use the term *Aussiedler* [resettler] rather than "displaced person", in view of a certain arbitrariness of use of the latter term with regard to people leaving for Germany claiming "German descent", as in the majority of cases their decision to leave Poland was voluntary. This issue will be discussed in more detail below.

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

This paper is based on material collected during field research in Germany as part of an individual postdoctoral project "Die Welten der (Spät-)Aussiedler aus Oberschlesien in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland" carried out at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main and funded by the DAAD. As part of the project, several dozen interviews were conducted – mainly unstructured interviews with a standardised amount of sought information – with people who emigrated to Germany between 1970 and 2000 and obtained *Aussiedler* status. Besides, the material was supplemented by a number of expert interviews.[3] The interviews with the *Aus-*

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[2] The migration in the 1980s, especially to West Germany, was such a significant and socially interesting phenomenon that the German political scholar and columnist Wolf Oschlies published a report on emigration from Poland: *Exodus Poloniae? Polnische Ausreise- und Emigrationsfragen 1980-1982*. He cites opinions that the majority of the applicants for tourist visas were people of "German descent." The use of the word "exodus", especially with regard to the emigration of the 1980s, is justified, as evidenced by statistics on migration to various Western European countries and on overseas migration. The data contained in the statistical yearbooks do not give a full picture of migrations, because simply summing the data from individual countries registering immigrants from Poland gives a total that well exceeds the official Polish data. This may be related to the fact that "the official definition of an emigrant used by the Central Statistical Office is a person who has deregistered from his/her permanent address" (K. Iglicka, *Kontrasty migracyjne Polski. Wymiar transatlantycki*, Warsaw 2008, p. 19). At that time many people emigrated illegally, and some did not renounce their Polish citizenship.

[3] The expert interviews were conducted with activists of Polish immigrant community organisations in Germany, activists of organisations of Lower and Upper Silesians, German officials, former employees of the transit camps in Friedland and Unna Massen, social workers of the time, representatives of social and cultural life dealing in their activities (including artistic work) with the *Aussiedler* question, priests serving in the Polish Catholic Missions in Germany and representatives of the German Catholic Church, as well as German politicians associated with the Federation of Expellees. The interviews were

siedlers were conducted in Hessen, North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate.

The respondents were purposefully selected, and originated from different social and professional groups. Among them were both classic "winners" of migration processes and people who can be classified as "losers". Obviously, this type of categorisation may be considered controversial. The Upper Silesians with whom I spoke placed themselves into various identity categories – some claimed a strong German identity, others a regional Silesian identity or a Polish identity, while in some cases there was no clear self-classification, or else the "European" category was chosen. In addition, they were involved in social and organisational activities (Polish, Silesian or German) to different extents, with the majority of them being uninvolved or "invisible".[4]

The research focused mainly on Upper Silesian people living in Germany, as it was from this region that most Polish citizens emigrated on the ground of German descent. However, as they themselves admit in the interviews, in most cases they were considered by the Germans to be "Poles" or people "from Poland". Of course, it should be remembered that Upper Silesians living in Germany often distance themselves from both the Germans and the German "Polish immigrant community". They also immerse themselves in their ethnic and regional identity, which is safe in the event of identity problems, because it allows them to combine Polishness and Germanness. But first and foremost, the group is heterogeneous in terms of their identity, family history and main reasons for emigration.

German statistics and various compilations based on them[5] clearly show that since the 1950s, the highest percentage of people emigrating to Germany have been Upper Silesians coming from the provinces of Katowice and Opole. Between 1971 and 1975, this group accounted for 51.2% of those leaving Poland, while between 1976 and 1979 their number increased to 71.9%. In 1980–1985, about 60% of migrants in this category came from Upper Silesia.[6] The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s saw a record number of people leaving for Germany, and in this case too it should be

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supplemented by participant observation: at the 2nd Congress of Polish Organisations in Germany, held in Düsseldorf in October 2014, the Congress of Silesian Compatriots in Hannover in June 2015, the formal gala of the Polish immigrant community during the presentation of the annual Polish community prize "Polonicus" in Aachen, a visit of the former Unna Massen workers to the former camp for *Aussiedlers*, a visit to the camp in Friedland, Polish religious services, and an *Aussiedlers'* pilgrimage from the Diocese of Essen to Kevelaer in May 2015. During all of the meetings, I held conversations with participants and documented them – hence the significant number of interviews and discussions. The selection of experts was also aimed at gathering as much material and as many opinions as possible on how Upper Silesians are perceived in Germany, and explaining various complexities.

[4] Peter Oliver Loew, author of a book about Poles in Germany, titled it *Wir Unsichtbaren. Geschichte der Polen in Deutschland* ("We the invisible. The history of Poles in Germany") München 2014. However, as the author points out, this term was first used in relation to Poles in Adam Soboczyński's 2006 article "Wir Unsichtbaren" published in *Die Zeit*. The issue of the "invisibility" of Poles in Germany was also commented on in a humorous and idiosyncratic way by Adam Gusowski and Piotr Mordel in their book *Der Club der polnischen Versager*.

[5] J. Korbel*, Polska – Górny Śląsk – Niemcy. Polityczny bilans 50-lecia Poczdamu*, Opole 1995.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

assumed that the majority of them were Upper Silesians. In total, in the analysed period, over a million Polish citizens, mostly from Upper Silesia, left Poland claiming "German descent". This is confirmed by, for example, reports and articles about *Aussiedlers* published in the German press, as well as research on the *Aussiedlers* from Poland.

Table 1

Poles who emigrated claiming "German descent"

Year	Total number of *Aussiedlers*	*Aussiedlers* from Poland	% of *Aussiedlers* from Poland	Year	Total number of *Aussiedlers*	*Aussiedlers* from Poland	% of *Aussiedlers* from Poland
1970	18,590	5,624	30.2	1985	38,968	22,075	56.6
1971	33,272	25,241	75.9	1986	42,788	27,188	63.5
1972	23,580	13,476	57.1	1987	78,523	48,419	61.6
1973	22,732	8,902	39.2	1988	202,673	140,226	69.2
1974	24,315	7,825	32.2	1989	377,055	250,340	66.4
1975	19,327	7,040	36.4	1990	397,073	133,872	33.7
1976	44,248	29,366	66.4	1991	221,995	40,131	18.0
1977	54,169	32,861	60.7	1992	230,565	17,749	7.7
1978	58,062	36,102	62.2	1993	218,888	5,431	2.5
1979	54,809	36,274	66.2	1994	222,591	2,440	1.1
1980	51,984	26,637	51.2	1995	217,898	1,677	0.8
1981	69,336	50,983	73.5	1996	177,751	1,175	0.7
1982	47,993	30,355	63.2	1997	134,419	687	0.5
1983	37,925	19,122	50.4	1998	103,080	488	0.5
1984	36,459	17,455	47.9	1999	104,916	428	0.4

Source: author's own compilation based on: W. Arnold (ed.), *Die Aussiedler in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Forschungen der AWR Deutsche Sektion. Part 1: Herkunft, Ausreise, Aufnahme*, Vienna 1985, p. 41; J. Korbel, *Polska – Górny Śląsk – Niemcy. Polityczny bilans 50-lecia Poczdamu*, Opole 1995, p. 39; A. Trzcielińska-Polus, *„Wysiedleńcy" z Polski w Republice Federalnej Niemiec w latach 1980–1990*, Opole 1997, p. 41; S. Worbs, E. Bund, M. Kohls, C. Babka von Gostomski, *(Spät-)Aussiedler in Deutschland. Eine Analyse aktueller Daten und Forschungsergebnisse*, Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2013, pp. 31-32.

THE UPPER SILESIAN CORNER[7] AND BIG POLITICS

Upper Silesia is a region which in the past used to be a classic example of a cultural border region.[8] Although nowadays its ethnic character has changed, its former

[7] In 1934, referring to the historian Ezechiel Zivier, Emil Szramek wrote of the geographical location of Upper Silesia: "Geographically speaking, Silesia is a kind of corner and for centuries it has shared the fate of all corners, that is, they are hit and bumped into. And each collision and pressure causes a movement that is either external, that is, a change in position, or an internal, heat-generating movement that either binds or blows something up" (E. Szramek, *Śląsk jako problem socjologiczny*, Katowice 1934, p. 24).

[8] As a border region, Upper Silesia was a topic discussed by Paweł Rybicki and Józef Chlebowczyk, whose works are already among the classic treatises on Upper Silesia. The type of borderland that Upper

changing state affiliation has left its mark. The cultural difference between the former Austrian part and what became (after the Silesian wars) the Prussian part of the region remains visible. Polish, Czech, Austrian and Prussian influences are noticeable in its culture and architecture, customs and place names. Thus, these influences affect both the identity of the inhabitants of the region and their collective memory. This is important especially with regard to the former Prussian Upper Silesia, because those Upper Silesians who emigrated to Germany highlight the dual Upper Silesian soul, which places them somewhere between Poles and Germans. As one of the interviewees remarked:

> (…) I would say this about myself, my mother taught me discipline, accuracy and reliability, and my father taught me imagination, and so colloquially speaking, a Pole sits on a horse with a sabre, "hurrah" [he laughs] but not a German, a German is thorough, slow but accurate. I on the other hand am in between, I have both this and that (…). I have noticed a lot of things here that I knew in my childhood, but which only started to make sense here, my mother instilled some things in me but I didn't understand that: what for, when something else was going on around?[9]

The interviews also reveal other small but significant differences between those who emigrated from the eastern part of Upper Silesia, which belonged to Poland in the interwar period, and those who had been born in the areas which were incorporated into Poland after World War II.

The "corner" location – to use the evocative metaphor popularised by Emil Szramek in his classic dissertation from 1934, *Śląsk jako problem socjologiczny* ("Silesia as a sociological problem") – combined with German citizenship law meant that many native Upper Silesians were still entitled to German citizenship many years after the war, inheriting it from their ancestors. This was not the first time that big politics had entered the lives of the inhabitants of the region and determined their fate. However, on both sides of the former border, it affected their lives most painfully during World War II, when the *Deutsche Volksliste* (the German People's List) and the compulsory service of young men in the *Wehrmacht* were introduced in the territories incorporated into the Reich.[10] The next generations, born after the war, would benefit

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Silesia represented was defined by Chlebowczyk as contact borderlands, "areas of coexistence of linguistic and ethnic groups with a clear separate identity" (J. Chlebowczyk, *O prawie do bytu małych i młodych narodów. Kwestia narodowa i procesy narodotwórcze we wschodniej Europie środkowej w dobie kapitalizmu (od schyłku XVII do początków XX w.)*, Warsaw–Cracow1983, p. 30).

[9] Interview conducted on 1 February 2015 and 1 March 2015 in F.; the respondent left Poland in 1991.

[10] The situation of the Upper Silesians during World War II and the problems related to the registering on the German national list and the service of men in *Wehrmacht* uniforms is best illustrated by the then popular verse: "If you don't sign it up, it's your fault, because they're gonna send you to Auschwitz, and if you sign it up, you old donkey, Hitler will send you to the *Ostfront*" (quoted after R. Kaczmarek, *Górny Śląsk podczas II wojny światowej*, Katowice 2006, p. 186). On the other hand, Aleksandra Kunce, in discussing that period, states that: "an important moment on the map of the Silesian past is the time of World War II, the so-called 'za Niymca' period (the German times). This is a bad time regardless of the national option chosen. For it forces people to make unambiguous national and religious declarations, it leads to the closing of the family within their own home and adoption of an attitude of vigilance against

from the collective citizenship, the *Volksliste*, or military ID of that time to gain the possibility of emigrating to the West.

The post-war history of the region is closely tied to the dramatic consequences of the "liberation" by the Red Army, the deportation of labourers to the East, and verification and rehabilitation of the native population. It was also a time of displacement of the German population and German Upper Silesians. A common theme in the family stories of the interviewees from that period is that of waiting. Waiting for husbands, fathers, brothers who, as *Wehrmacht* soldiers, had not yet returned from the war or post-war exile. It was also a struggle to be able to stay in the land of their fathers, at home. There is also the theme of returns – to the homeland after the evacuation, hoping to meet loved ones who had not yet returned from the front:

> (…) the war is almost over, the enemy from the East is attacking, I mean the "liberator of Poland", and those there get an order to leave, whole villages must leave – as it was colloquially said – before the front, and they had to retreat, so this Krzanowice was evacuated to Bavaria, these people had a gathering point, this logistics in Czechowice-Dziedzice, from there by trains to the West, (…) these German authorities tell those ... exiles or whatever you call them, that they can stay here [in Bavaria – author's note], but they can also go back, so my cousins, my grandmother's aunts, that they are going back, that their husbands are waiting, but nobody was waiting there (…)[11]

It was also a time of waiting for men who had been deported to the East. One of the most dramatic memories from that period is that of an elderly couple, especially the man, whose father had been deported to the East on Ash Wednesday of 1945. But waiting did not always mean pain. One of the interviewees, who studied at a teacher's college and was evacuated with the entire school, returned home to Gliwice after having been separated from his family during the war:

> (…) everyone had to go on their own, as they liquidated everything, everyone chose how they wanted to go. I went to Jelenia Góra [he laughs] and then these people were evacuated by the Red Cross. I got to Czechoslovakia (…) first I worked for a farmer, but the farmer had to flee Czechoslovakia (…) and then there was a *Lager*, then the Americans came, the army. They said that we would go back home, to Gliwice in Silesia. There were more people, so I joined them and got into the carriage, the train (…) but then they handed us over to the Russians, and from the *Lager*, I worked for the farmer there but then I wanted to go home, it was already 1946, so I got to the Polish Consulate and then I got to Poland.[12]

The respondent did not speak Polish but, as he said: "we had to know the Lord's Prayer" and say that "we want to go to holy Poland".

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the enemy – often a neighbour they know. Like no other period, this period – marked by family separation, uncertainty – is bad for everyone. It is a burden because it forces people to fight against their neighbours, it is marked with the death of both. Despite the differences in the assessment of economic conditions (some were better and some worse off), despite the difference in the assessment of individual contributions to military activity, this time is judged similarly" (A. Kunce, Śląskie okno, *Śląsk*, 11/2000, p. 18).

[11] Interview conducted on 4 November 2014 in O., departure in 1990, born 1954.

[12] Interview conducted on 1 May 2015, departure in 1979, born 1929.

> (…) and then I had to go home on my own, at night I went home (…) I came home but the gate was closed, I had to jump over the fence, I knocked, my father came, "who's there?" I said [the name is given – author's note], no. Then they were surprised that I was walking just like that at night because there were various bands, but luckily I got home.[13]

At first, the interviewee's father did not recognise his son after a few years of separation and called out to his wife: "come here, someone here says that he is [the name is given – author's note]."

Some people, especially those identifying as German, felt that it was not they who had left Germany, but that it was the German state that had abandoned them. It was a kind of post-war migration while still living in the same place. As one of the interviewees noted:

> (…) I was born in the same house as my mother. My mother was born in Germany and I was born in Poland.[14]

As described by the interviewees and confirmed by scholarly studies, the Polish–German border itself did not seem certain:

> The Federal Republic of Germany (…) disavowed the relevant decisions of the Potsdam Agreement, taking the position that as *res inter alios gesta*, this agreement was not in fact binding on Germany. That state assumed (…) that the new western Polish border was only a provisional one until the conclusion of a peace treaty with a united Germany. This reservation regarding the peace treaty (…) was also taken to mean that the German Reich formally still existed within the borders of 31 December 1937, that is from the period before the beginning of the Nazi annexations and conquests. At the same time, the Federal Republic of Germany considered itself to be identical or at least partially identical with the Reich thus understood.[15]

The same is reflected in the statement of one of the elderly interviewees, whose family did not want to leave for Germany just after the war:

> (...) my grandfather, who is such a Pole, you know, he said, he's got a roof over his head here and is not going anywhere, and some said "we will stay here because they will all come back" and indeed, even those people from the East (…) moved into the houses, they said "we are not doing anything here because we don't know whether they will come back or not."[16]

One of the most important events in post-war Polish–German relations was the signing of a normalisation treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Polish People's Republic. The document, regulating – among others – the issue of the Polish–German border, was initialled by the two countries' foreign ministers in

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[13] *Ibid*.

[14] Interview conducted on 28 May 2015, departure in 1981, born 1957.

[15] L. Janicki, Podstawy prawne stosunków Polski ze zjednoczonymi Niemcami, *Przegląd Zachodni*, 16/1992, p. 11.

[16] Interview conducted on 1 May 2015 in D., departure in 1979, born 1934.

November 1970. It was signed in December of the same year by Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz and Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt. Another important document was the "Protocol Record" of 9 October 1975, signed by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Poland, Stefan Olszowski, and German Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Hans-Dietrich Genscher, which entered into force in 1976. This document provided that Poland consented to the emigration of 120–125 thousand people to Germany in the next four years.[17]

The signing of the normalisation treaty and subsequent agreements had a significant impact on the demographic structure of Upper Silesia and Germany. In the case of Poland, it meant the loss of relatively young citizens who, if not yet college graduates, had completed secondary and vocational education, and were thus needed for the development of the economy of the time. On the other hand, the Federal Republic of Germany gained citizens of working age, while incurring practically no costs of educating them.[18] Besides, the average age of the *Aussiedlers* was lower than that of citizens of West Germany at that time, because many of them came with children.[19] Of course, at first, the German state incurred costs related to social assistance, language courses and welfare benefits, but in the end these were outweighed by the profit gained. This situation was reflected in the views of leading German politicians of that period.[20]

In this context, not only political issues – the link between economic and humanitarian matters, and a kind of trade: Upper Silesians for marks[21] – are interesting, but also legal ones, because according to the then interpretation "no one has lost the rights that they were entitled to under the binding West German laws (e.g. citizenship)".[22] As a consequence, after 1970 and especially after the Helsinki arrangements of 1975, there was a significant increase in the number of people leaving for Germany compared with previous years. Many of those who left would later receive future generations of Upper Silesians, who thanks to their family ties would legalise their stay in Germany. Therefore, it is reasonable to discuss emigration from Upper Silesia in terms of a chain migration. German authors[23] have pointed out that the

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[17] Cf. Z. Łempiński, *RFN wobec problemów ludnościowych w stosunkach z Polską (1970-1985)*, Katowice 1987, pp. 288-289.

[18] Cf. A. Trzcielińska-Polus, *„Wysiedleńcy" z Polski w Republice Federalnej Niemiec w latach 1980-1990*, Opole 1997, pp.63-67.

[19] Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-31.

[20] Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-77.

[21] The Helsinki conference arrangements would be another turning point. Helmut Schmidt, in his book *Die Deutschen und ihre Nachbarn*, quotes a statement by Edward Gierek that the Silesians change their nationality depending on the economic situation – when the Poles do well, Silesians are Poles; when the Germans do well, they are Germans (H. Schmidt, *op.cit.*, p. 481). The context of this statement is also important – a private conversation between two politicians on a night walk during a break in the negotiations between the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany at the conference in Helsinki in 1975.

[22] D. Bingen, *Polityka Republiki Bońskiej wobec Polski*, Cracow 1997, p. 136.

[23] S. Stępień, *Jugendliche Umsiedler aus Schlesien. Eine empirische Untersuchung über Konsequenzen der Wanderung*, Weinheim–Basel 1981.

people who contributed to the migration chain were those family members who had left for Germany just after the war. Undoubtedly, however, the migration chain was most influenced by departures and migration networks that formed after the signing of the normalisation treaty. This topic is also discussed by the interviewees. Usually, the interviewees were going "to someone" who already lived in West Germany, and themselves would often support those who came later – usually family, but sometimes friends. This – according to one of the interviewees, a Polish priest in ministry – distinguishes that migration:

> (…) This is the difference that I told you is what makes Silesians different from others, first their parents or one parent or grandparents came here, and then they brought young people to live here. As for the other Poles, the opposite is true: first the young leave and then they bring older ones to live here, their parents or even grandparents (…) this is how I see it and understand from talking to people.[24]

The younger generation, born in the People's Republic of Poland and brought up in an atmosphere of suspension, felt the painful impact that the possibility of emigration had on family life. As one of the interviewees noted:

> (…) I was born in Gliwice in 1964. I was brought up in the familoks [multi-family houses]. (…) In our times there was no value at all, absolute discomfort, a toilet on the staircase, no gas, no heating (…) My mother wanted to move into an apartment block very much, but my father kept going to the *Reich*. When I was seven, I knew three words in German: *Antrag*, *Absage*, *Widerruf* [she laughs] and so my whole life passed in three stages, my father kept applying to be allowed to emigrate to Germany permanently, and he was refused (…) nothing could be planned. All my mother's plans were thwarted.[25]

People often applied over many years, and it happened that each time their applications were rejected. Consent to leave was often given when the interviewees were near retirement age or their children were, for example, just about to take their secondary school leaving examination. This caused further complications and was the cause of drama after their dream arrival in Germany. It happened that consent was never given, which is why a large number of people chose the "illegal" route by buying a guided tour, visiting relatives and friends, obtaining tourist and transit visas, and then legalising their stay in one of the transit camps in Germany.

AUSSIEDLER MEANING WHO?

Bearing in mind the complexities of the history of Upper Silesia and the legal problems, the question arises: Who are the *Aussiedlers*? For the first time, the term *Aussiedler* or "displaced person" officially appeared in German legislation in 1957 in

[24] Interview conducted on 16 February 2015 with a Polish priest serving in Germany.
[25] Interview conducted on 17 November 2014 in K., departure in 1981, born 1964.

a law on expellees, as a term describing an independent group which had previously been neither mentioned nor named, but fell into the category of "expellees".[26] Two important legal provisions applied to Polish citizens: the first, contained in Article 116 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, granting the right to German citizenship to those (and their descendants) born in territories belonging to Germany before 1 January 1938, and the second recognising the citizenship the Third Reich had granted during World War II.[27] Those who lived in the parts of Upper Silesia that had belonged to Germany in the interwar period usually emigrated under Article 116, while those born in the eastern part of Upper Silesia that had belonged to Poland took advantage of the citizenship granted to them or their ancestors during the war.

Polish citizens emigrated to Germany both legally and illegally. In the former case, they applied for permission to leave the country; in the latter they went to Germany because they had an invitation or tourist or transit visas, or had purchased a foreign guided tour. This kind of departure was kept secret even from their closest family. Those who emigrated in the 1990s, after the borders had been opened, did so quite openly, without concealing their destination from their families or anyone else. The manner and time of departure are of great importance in the case of the Upper Silesians living in Germany today. Some differences between those leaving in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s can be discerned. The majority of people who emigrated in the 1970s with their entire families on the basis of an application for permission to leave came from the part of Upper Silesia which had not belonged to Poland until 1945. Later emigrants, who had lived longer in Poland, more often left having obtained a tourist visa or an invitation, although there are some exceptions in these cases as well.

People who came to Germany and registered as *Aussiedlers* were offered more help than other immigrant groups. This meant that such departures became more and more popular in due course. There were even special publications for *Aussiedlers*: guides and information brochures published in West Germany. There was also a Pol-

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[26] G. Weber, A. Nassehi, R. Weber-Schlenther, O. Sill, G. Kneer. G. Nollmann, L. Saake, *Emigration der Siebenbürger Sachsen. Studien zu Ost-West-Wanderung im 20. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden 2002, p. 160.

[27] Tadeusz Folek provides the following interpretation of the German legal regulations: "There is no concept and institution of 'West German citizenship' in the Federal Republic of Germany, but only 'German citizenship' in the sense of continuing 'general German citizenship'" (Folek, 1987, p. 189). The status of the German borders is taken to be as of 31 December 1937, but those who became citizens of the Third Reich through registration on the DVL are also included. This is something of a paradox, in that this is a Nazi law that is still in force. As Folek notes, for many *Aussiedlers* this is a law allowing them to "leap into the free world" (Folek, 1987, p. 190). He describes the position as follows. The Third Reich declared only military surrender, not the liquidation of the state. Thus, general German citizenship still exists, so citizens of the Third Reich and their descendants are entitled to German citizenship. It is assumed that all those applying for such citizenship are Germans. Moreover, declarations submitted after the war are not relevant. Another paradox is that according to the People's Republic of Poland, acts of granting of citizenship in the time of the Third Reich were unlawful and therefore invalid, but the state allowed its citizens to leave for Germany with a travel document according to which they could be stated not to be Poles. Cf. T. Folek, *Prawo azylu i dziedziczenie obywatelstwa niemieckiego. Przepisy ustawowe wraz z komentarzem według stanu prawnego na dzień 1 maja 1987*, Cologne 1987, p. 193.

ish response to the demand for information regarding the legalisation of residence in West Germany. Tadeusz Folek wrote a series of guides (updated whenever the law was amended) containing German citizenship regulations and interpretation of German law. He also published – despite the reservations he had[28] – information about the possibility of legalising one's residence based on "German papers".

In a monumental work devoted to *Aussiedlers* from Transylvania, German scholars note that they were Germans in legal terms but foreigners in cultural terms.[29] A similar remark can be found in a book by Peter Olivier Loew, who places *Aussiedlers* from Poland in the category of Poles living in Germany.[30] On the other hand, in the first sentence of the foreword to the book *Aussiedler. Die Voraussetzungen für die Anerkennung als Vertriebener. Arbeitshandbuch für Behörden, Gerichte und Verbände* published in 1988, Ernst Liesner states that "the *Aussiedlers* are Germans".[31] He also says that their reason for going to Germany is discrimination in their place of origin, a feeling of isolation, and hence the desire to leave to be able to live like Germans among Germans.[32] This way of portraying the *Aussiedlers* was common in official German publications.

On the other hand, Aleksandra Trzcielińska-Polus says of the term *Aussiedler*:

> [It] was coined immediately after the end of World War II to describe the German population subject to forced displacement from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to Germany, as agreed at the Potsdam Conference. It is still used today, although the nature of the departures of the people it refers to has changed dramatically.[33]

However, what is the most important issue here, arousing some controversy and having a negative impact on the perception of this group in Poland, is the fact that, under the law, the *Aussiedlers* are "expellees". Therefore, it is assumed that their departure was not voluntary.[34] The fact of being expelled, not only under the law but also

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[28] T. Folek, *Pobyt cudzoziemców, azyl polityczny, obywatelstwo, adopcja w Republice Federalnej Niemiec. Vademecum Prawne cudzoziemca w RFN*, Cologne 1985, p. 5.

[29] G. Weber et al., *op.cit*., p. 120.

[30] As Peter Oliver Loew points out: "the group of displaced and late displaced people from Poland is, despite all the common features, extremely heterogeneous: some have assimilated completely, while others have not done so at all and, as they approach retirement, are thinking about returning to Poland. Between these extremes, a whole range of intermediate, dual and hybrid identities can be found. This is particularly true of the Upper Silesians, who, after moving to Germany, quite often retained their specific regional features (and their language, a dialect of Polish), thus cultivating an identity that is neither Polish nor German" (P. Loew, *op. cit*., p. 214).

[31] E. Liesner, *Aussiedler.Die Voraussetzungen für die Anerkennung als Vertriebener.Arbeitshandbuch für Behörden, Gerichte und Verbände*, Bonn 1988, p. 3.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[33] A. Trzcielińska-Polus, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[34] Dariusz Niedźwiecki quotes a typology of forced migration proposed by Krystyna Kersten. It includes, in this order, expulsion, displacement, deportation and resettlement. "Expulsion (…) refers to a migration process whose sole perpetrator is the expelling party with the purpose of removing a specific individual or social group from a given area. In the case of displacement, we deal with a planned action

formally, is emphasised by the authors of the study devoted to the Transylvanian *Aussiedlers*.[35] Since the 1970s the term *Spätaussiedler*, meaning "later displaced person", has been used. However, this term officially began to be used after the change in the law and refers to people who emigrated after 1993.[36]

To describe the *Aussiedlers* as "resettled persons" – such formulations can also be found in the literature on the subject[37] – would be more appropriate, because in the case of resettlement "apart from a resettlement institution, implementing some sort of a plan for the relocation of the population, also the people changing their place of residence actively participate in the process. So this is the process of a partly voluntary change of place of residence. In other words, you can resettle, not just be resettled."[38] In this sense, Upper Silesians would be "resettled persons", but in the majority of cases we are not dealing with classic resettlement. Moreover, it can hardly be called an organised action when the departure was prepared in secret and effected using a tourist visa.

THE *REICH* MYTH AND REASONS FOR RECLAIMING GERMAN CITIZENSHIP BY DESCENT

When discussing the reasons for the mass emigration of Upper Silesians to West Germany, many factors should be taken into account, as it was a combination of economic, political, identity and family motivations that caused such a large outflow of the native population from Upper Silesia. Also, one should mention the attitude of the Polish authorities towards national and ethnic minorities[39] and a common feeling among Upper Silesians that they were treated as second-class citizens. Compared with immigrants to Upper Silesia from other regions of Poland, they lived in worse conditions – they were not given preferential housing, at work they were overlooked for promotion, and they suffered discrimination because of the dialect and language they used.

It should be stressed that migrations from Upper Silesian were chain migrations. This migration chain was reinforced by letters from those who had left earlier, parcels sent by them, or the exchange rate of the mark against the Polish zloty. The country

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aimed at a certain community, while the displaced party plays a passive role in the process, being subject to direct coercion by the displacing parties" (D. Niedźwiecki, *Migracje i tożsamość. Od teorii do analizy przypadku*, Cracow 2010, p. 24). On the other hand, deportation – as opposed to displacement – may also apply to individuals, and the place of deportation is strictly defined (cf. *ibid.*, p. 24).

[35] G. Weber et al., *op. cit*., p. 160.

[36] Cf. P. Loew, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[37] S. Stepień, *Jugendliche Umsiedler aus Schlesien...*, B. Hager, *Probleme soziokultureller und gesellschaftlicher Integration junger Migranten dargestellt am Beispiel der oberschlesischen Übersiedler in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Dortmund 1980.

[38] D. Niedźwiecki, *op. cit*., p. 24.

[39] S. Łodziński, *Równość i różnica. Mniejszości narodowe w porządku demokratycznym w Polsce po 1989 roku,* Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2005.

itself made an impression on those coming to Germany to visit. Undoubtedly, for the interviewees from the generation who left in the 1970s, their German descent was often a decisive factor. However, this strong identity overlapped with the economic, professional or housing situation in the region of their origin. Then, various family situations made up what I have described as "painful memory".[40] All of this can be analysed in terms of "bad faith", a term proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre and used by Peter Berger to discuss social roles. This bad faith, as Berger writes, "is to pretend that something is necessary that in fact is voluntary."[41] All the push and pull factors that make one feel that the best solution is to go to Germany accumulate in this bad faith.

Even then the myth of the *Reich* or the Golden West was dominant, as seen in the story of a confectioner who ran his own bakery and confectionery in Poland, and now for several decades has been doing the same in Germany:

> (…) those were the days when people fled to Germany. In 1976, you know, I had had my own business for two years, in 1974, so it happened that Germany impressed me (…) We were on holiday in Poland: me, my wife and our small child, I drove to Międzyzdroje to spend my holidays there and we, two families, stayed in a caravan. A German came in a car with a big caravan and I liked that because we, two families were squeezed in such a small shed [he laughs] and we both "OK, woman, we're getting the heck out of here" [he laughs] (…) I got the papers and I left right away, and it worked out, everything's been fine since then. (…) I had never been to Germany and I thought that the grass was made of gold here [he laughs], that gold fell from the sky, but my eyes have opened (…) that's right, it's cool, you know, the only thing you need is a lot of money and then it's cool everywhere. Now it is fine all over the world, once people had money, but you couldn't buy anything in Poland, and now it's the other way round, there's no money, and you can buy anything [he laughs].[42]

Although it took place in the 1970s when most emigration was done legally, this departure was illegal – being based on a tourist visa to Italy. Another interviewee, a doctor, also left for Germany illegally in the 1970s. This is what she says about her first impressions, back in 1963, and in her account one can find an element of "bad faith":

> My parents left in 1959, more or less, I visited them twice, my father was seriously ill, that's why they came here. He regained his strength and then, in 1971, my husband and I decided to come here (…) that inability to go anywhere or pursue a professional or academic career. We really only wanted to come here, complete a specialist training programme and go back, but then… the martial law. (…) I was enchanted, especially as it was the south where I went, Lake Constance, a beautiful area, everything so clean [she draws out the vowels], so polished, the cars so nice. I know nothing about cars but even the petrol smelled different. When I saw women scrubbing the pavement in front of their houses, I was completely dumbfounded, although it is also done in Silesia (…) My husband said, he didn't come until 1971, that when he saw how many kinds of bread, cheese and sausages were offered in shops, he was staggered, he stood with his brother-in-law and looked and said "will

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[40] J. Kijonka, Górnośląska rodzina i dom – przestrzenie pamięci i zapomnienia, *Pedagogika Społeczna*, 1/2016.

[41] P. L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A. Humanistic Perspective,* Carden City, New York 1963 (polskie tłumaczenie *Zaproszenie do socjologii*, Warsaw 2000, p. 135).

[42] Interview conducted on 6 December 2014, departure in 1976 at the age of 24.

> we be able to try everything at least once in our lives?" I didn't because such things did not appeal to me, but the possibility itself. (…) Me and my mum, we went to the market and there were bananas, so big! There were no bananas in Poland back then and it was all so nice, so clean, and these people were so kind. At that time, the atmosphere in Poland was horrible, no one greeted anyone, everyone was so sad, grey and no one smiled, and suddenly they greet each other here. I didn't know if they knew each other, "good morning, good morning". Everywhere, full of these flowers, it is really beautiful there, they plant these flowers everywhere. It was September, and these apples so big and fruit orchards wherever you went. Then our neighbour took us to Switzerland, the same there, Austria so beautiful, I went by train, people were kind, nice, I was enchanted.[43]

Admiration associated with the first visits to Germany, and the impression made by the order and wealth, are common experiences of my interviewees. However, the trip to Germany itself is not an easy "rite of passage". Crossing the border between East and West Germany was a unique experience. The recollections of this experience are often accompanied by expressions using colours – from a grey, dark reality to a colourful world illuminated at night. Children's first impressions are also noteworthy:

> (…) We had family in Germany. They left Poland just after the war and went to Germany (…) they kept in touch with us, we got parcels in Poland, I always knew there was something else out there [he laughs] besides grey communist Poland (…) my parents always wanted to leave, but they didn't get *Zusage*, (…) and then in 1985 we went to Germany for the first time. I must say that I liked it very much because we only visited amusement parks [he laughs] I thought that the reality was like that, with amusement parks (…) I brought back coloured pencils and erasers that were unknown in Poland. I gave them away in class, I shared them with my classmates, friends (…), and in 1987 it was so that we wanted to leave for good, my parents asked my brother and me if we wanted to leave (…) he wanted to and so did I because I liked it there, there wasn't much deliberation because the world appeared so colourful there [he sighs].[44]

Another interviewee gave the following account:

> I would like to tell you about a circumstance where I felt that I was in a completely different world (…) as we crossed the GDR border. The GDR was like a ghost state, nothing was going on there, there were no people, no movement, nothing. We waited all night at the border on a sidetrack. (…) We crossed the East German–West German border, there were a lot of cars, it was amazing! I couldn't believe that there can be so many cars in one place in the world. We drove next to Wolfsburg, these must have been Volkswagen's car parks, it might be the reason why I remember it. And my father "yeah, you're gonna see what nice things they have here." All the time, he and mum wanted to comfort us by saying that it is great here and everything is the best. These were the beginnings, those camps, it was horrible, how unkind the officials were. At least my dad spoke German, but there were displaced people who did not speak German at all although they had German papers (…) the Germans could not understand that: "how can it be that you come here as Germans and you can't speak German?"[45]

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[43] Interview conducted on 4 May 2015 in W., departure in 1971, born 1940.
[44] Interview conducted on 4 December 2014 in W., departure in 1987.
[45] Interview conducted on 17 November 2014 in K., departure in 1981, born 1964.

The first impression fades quickly and is replaced by a difficult start in Germany. In the case of the family of the first interviewee quoted above, there is even a desire to return to Poland, but there is nothing to return to. Proverbial bridges had been burned, the flat given up. The German reality turned out to be more difficult than expected. Life also brought an unknown experience to the interviewee's parents – that of being unemployed. He had an opportunity to attend a language course at a boarding school, but when he finally started attending school, he was not accepted as German by his peers. In the case of the second interviewee, who had come to Germany as a teenager, the German course itself, which was part of an innovative programme where young people without disabilities lived together with their mentally handicapped peers, turned out to be a difficult experience.

The beginnings in Germany involved going through many formal procedures, not always pleasant and easy, even if you were staying with your family. Migration put those ties to the test very painfully. Being put up by the family was a traumatic experience for the interviewees, who had often left their flats or even houses in Poland. Relatives soon ceased to be so hospitable, and even if the interviewees got a temporary flat (waiting for a permanent flat could take years), especially at the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s the conditions were makeshift. It was not uncommon for the whole family to live in one room and share a kitchen and the bathroom with several other people or families. It also happened, as in the case of a couple I interviewed, that one large room was divided by curtains and wardrobes and used as a flat for two families. How this period was remembered varies and depends on the interviewee, the expectations with which she or he came to Germany, and even the age at which she or he decided to emigrate. There are those – and they are the majority – for whom it was a traumatic period, and they are reluctant to talk about it. Some got to know their friends in those difficult times. According to the interviewees, the most difficult conditions prevailed after the re-unification of Germany, when, as they admit, there were too many people who needed help. Besides, changes in the law in the 1990s also made it difficult to start a new life in Germany.

Regardless of how this period is assessed in retrospect and what course life in Germany later took, it is remembered in the accounts as a difficult time. It can be summarised in the words of one of the interviewees:

> (…) If someone told me to do what I did again, I wouldn't do it, no. At the moment I recall it with a cool mind, but I don't know if anyone would do that again (…) coming here. One *Lager*, then another one, such a small flat, Jesus Christ, it was horrible! These are things I will never forget. I don't talk about it just like that, on a daily basis (…) I wouldn't do it again (…) it was horrible. I have no one to whom I could say "come here, it's great here", no one![46]

[46] Interview conducted on 22 May 2015 in F., departure in 1988, born 1948.

The interviewee touches upon an important topic here: letters and persuasion of friends to emigrate to Germany or legalise their stay in Germany. Parcels, and the creation of a certain image, played an important role:

> Husband: We sent large parcels to the family, we had not tried kiwi yet but we packed parcels weighing 40 kilograms for our parents.
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> Wife: The first parcels really did weigh 40–50 kilograms, we bought anything to send our parents, and a car from Silesia used to come and collect these parcels every week. We used to send three parcels: to his sister, who had four children, to my parents and my husband's parents, and then when my parents came here, the situation changed and we sent two parcels [she laughs] and we really did it regularly, because we wanted to help, and finally, after two years we got a flat.[47]

This, however, often added to the disappointment upon arrival:

> (…) One thing was written in the letters and then something else actually happened, help was no longer offered though it was declared, you had to fend for yourself, and besides, relationships in my family were kind of twisted and rough, I'm talking about my distant family, even though today my parents are still alive, by the way, my father is 90, born in 1924 and my mother in 1932, they are separated… Well, and my marriage also fell apart for one reason or another, and I live alone.[48]

It was not only the first encounter with the officials and poor housing conditions in temporary flats that were difficult, but above all the experience of unemployment and degradation. While doctors and engineers did well, lawyers and teachers could not find jobs in their professions. In addition, Germany, especially by the 1980s, was a computerised country, and despite their technical education, many people could not find jobs corresponding to their professions. A comparison between jobs in Poland, better ones through being behind a desk, and physical labour in Germany is a common theme in the interviews. In such a situation, even if someone found a job relevant to their profession, it meant commuting a long distance or even spending only weekends at home. The difficult situation was aggravated by the fact that in most cases, by definition the decision to emigrate to Germany meant leaving Poland for good, and returning home was not possible. The period of adaptation lasted up to several years, and as one of the interviewees noted:

> (…) it may have been only initially for a year or two, I also know people who could not withstand the pressure, also in my family, my cousin who had dreamed of going to Germany, and she did, but unfortunately she did not settle in here and after a month's stay in a camp she could not stand it anymore: "what am I going to do here? I've got a house there and I have to start from scratch here?" and she went back, there were those who could not stand the transition, the transition period, but if someone decided, it usually was, transitional periods are known to be difficult everywhere, these official matters, for example, German officials had the upper hand, they were dominant, it was the same, as I remember when we queued for passports, there the clerk was God, nobody had anything to say.[49]

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[47] Interview conducted on 25 March 2015 in K., departure in 1989, born 1951 (husband) and 1957 (wife).

[48] Interview conducted on 4 November 2014 in O., departure in 1990, born 1954.

[49] Interview conducted on 3 November 2014 in E., departure in 1997, born 1968.

Emigration was often the cause of human drama. It was linked to – in the case of illegal departures when only one person in the family left – the separation of spouses, which often resulted in divorce. On the other hand, for children who stayed in Poland as a kind of "deposit", the separation from their parents was a painful experience, because even if they managed to leave with the help of the Red Cross, they would be leaving their safe, familiar world to join parents who, after a year or even several years, had become strangers to them.

WITH HINDSIGHT

Despite the difficult beginnings, most of my respondents got on with their family and professional lives. Certainly, often the struggle against reality, working to furnish a long-awaited but empty flat as soon as possible, contributed to the breakdown of families. For the generations who remembered pre-war Germany, being seen as foreigners was a painful experience. Despite their German identity, they were treated as Poles by their neighbours and colleagues. Moreover, as Weronika Grabe pointed out in a publication titled *Upper Silesian "resettlers" in Germany*:

> German culture, despite being cultivated in their families to some extent, was alien to them because at that time West German society had already experienced a cultural revolution associated with the turning towards the West, towards American models in particular, and the customs fostered in Silesian homes seemed archaic in this context, often associated by the young generation of West Germans with the war years. Different life preferences for patterns of behaviour, ideals, the role of the family and religion made the newcomers different from their West German fellow citizens.[50]

Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that one of the interviewees remarked that she was glad that they had emigrated so late when her son was already an adult and her daughter almost of age, because she had already acquired behavioural patterns different from those of German youths. Another interviewee noted:

> (…) like my cousin who had waited 18 years to leave, he was 48 when he arrived [in 1989 – author's note] and what could he do here? He worked at a Mercedes in Düsseldorf alongside the Turks, who were at home here. This man is disappointed to this day because the Germany he dreamed of did not exist, it was the *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, which changed drastically after 1968, and people in Poland did not want to see that it was a completely different country (…) these people were terribly disappointed.[51]

The following years brought even greater changes in Germany. Today, this is a different country than the one my interviewees emigrated to. When they left they did not know German and learned it on special courses. More often than not they put all their

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[50] W. Grabe, *Górnośląscy „przesiedleńcy" w Niemczech*, in: A. Wolff-Powęska, E. Schulz (eds.), *Być Polakiem w Niemczech*, Poznań 2000, p. 235.

[51] Interview conducted on 23 April 2015 in E., departure in 1981.

energy into adjusting to the people around them as much as possible, which resulted in their children not knowing or having only a passive knowledge of the Polish language. Some admitted in the interviews that just after their arrival, not knowing German yet, they had whispered among themselves in Polish, afraid to use that language openly. At present, they feel somewhat bitter, because later *Aussiedlers* came from the former USSR, and migrants from Africa and Asia came to Germany, and above all the number of Turks increased; and all of them, or people with a so-called migrant background, were not ashamed of their languages, they spoke aloud in public places. Obviously, we are dealing here with a feeling of superiority over other – non-European – immigrants. An illustration of this is given by one answer to the question of how the country has changed while the interviewee has been living in Germany:

> (…) Soooo much, oh my! How it has changed! (…) these officials do not understand the problem; they will never assimilate. We Poles assimilate in different countries (…) anyway, they do not want to assimilate here. German people had *Wohlstand* in the 1970s and nowadays, day after day their situation is getting worse, it ruins them and we can see it all. But we Poles lived under communism and we managed to learn how to deal with many difficult matters (…) we wouldn't have achieved anything if we hadn't saved, we can do that. It's different now, the famous *Ordnung muss sein*, it's history now, I liked it when we talked about offices and stuff like that, it was all so organised and it is getting worse now.[52]

And the respondent's wife adds:

> (…) in Germany, everything was done by word of honour. If I told a clerk something was the case, the clerk believed me (…) as more people from all over the world started to come here and they are coming in large numbers from various parts of the world, the more they learned through experience, they felt that they were being regularly cheated. At the moment, it does not work like that anymore, the regulations have changed, there many more inspections and rightly so because there are many sly dogs who use every opportunity. There are also a lot of sly dogs from Poland who cheat, trick others as much as they can, use the German regulations to their advantage, just like Turks, Arabs, Russians, all nationalities milk the Germans.[53]

This is an exceptionally sharp but honest answer. However, such opinions are quite common. There is another important issue emphasised here – the wealth of Germany as a state. Besides, some people still talk about the so-called *Begrüßungsgeld* as evidence of Germany's prosperity and openness to foreigners. The German mark is often regarded by the respondents as a strong currency for which you could buy more both in Germany and in Poland:

> (…) at Aldi, for example, for 100 marks you had to take another trolley, and today I can carry 100 euros' worth in one bag.[54]

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[52] Interview conducted on 2 March 2015 in F., wife's departure in 1983, her husband joined her after eight months.

[53] *Ibid*.

[54] Interview conducted on 30 April 2015 in F., departure in 1990, born 1952 (husband), 1954 (wife).

And the respondent's wife adds:

> (…) well, when we came here twenty or so years ago, life was so much easier. They had everything here, you could pay for anything… I mean, anything you needed to get by. And so once a month, my family and I could afford to go out somewhere and eat something, and when my husband started working, we went to a Greek restaurant once a week.[55]

Another couple commented on the current situation in Germany:

> Wife: They've got poorer.
> Husband: It seems to me that they are getting poorer, anyway, all Europe is getting poorer.
> Wife: It used to be cleaner, there was better order, there were no empty shops, it has changed a lot!
> Husband: Poverty is swamping the whole of Europe, not only Germany.
> Wife: And terribly dirty.[56]

At the same time, Poland also saw enormous economic and political changes. Slowly, my respondents began to revert to using Polish in public places, also because the image of Poland in Germany had changed. The change began, as the interviewees note, just before Poland joined the European Union. Then the young generation, born in Germany, or "brought" to Germany by their parents, began to regret not knowing Polish. Their Polish descent, after years of jokes about Poles, was no longer concealed. Due to the changes in Poland, as time went by, the gifts that they used to bring to Poland were no longer attractive. The following conversations show some of the ideas that had grown up around those who left for Germany and their wealth. One of the couples I who spoke to note that:

> Wife: We always had to give, we had to bring something. There was always a comment when we visited Poland: "well, she came with only a bar of chocolate." I don't really like visiting Poland, because we have quite a lot of friends and you need to bring something for everyone and they have children, now the children are grown up but there are grandchildren and again you need to bring something for them. You cannot come empty-handed, think about everyone, pack (…) this is the age-old problem of everybody here, they are still dissatisfied and you did your best, really (…).
> Husband: The point is that they used to be happy with these gifts, because they couldn't get anything in Poland, and now they can have anything they want and here, for example, we wear second-hand clothes on one occasion or another, but if you bring second-hand but good clothes for them, they feel offended. But it is not that we bring worn-out clothes.[57]

Another couple comment:

> Husband: This process began in the mid-1990s, German goods were known in Poland, those from Aldi: "don't bring that".

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[55] Interview conducted on 18 April 2015 in K. departure in 1990.

[56] Interview conducted on 9 March 2015 in S., departure in 1989 to stay with family who had emigrated in 1978.

[57] Interview conducted on 2 March 2015 in F., wife's departure in 1983, her husband joined her after eight months.

> Wife: I use washing powder from Aldi and they want Persil or Ariel in Poland. I use cream from Aldi and his mother wants me to bring her L'Oreal (…) it annoys me, I don't buy it for myself. I've found goods from Aldi to be just as good but for less money.[58]

Many interviewees point out that family and friends who stayed in Poland were not even aware of how economical and modest a life they had to live to be able to afford certain goods or – as in the case of children – branded products that would allow them to function without inhibitions among their peers.

It is worth emphasising that despite some criticism of the Federal Republic of Germany, difficulties with acculturation and problems in professional and private life, in the case of health problems, illness or disability, medical care is of a higher standard and more accessible to patients. Some owe their lives to emigration.

> (…) but I have to say that when it comes to health or something, medicine and all that, I am happy to be here. This saved my life, I have [a pacemaker – author's note], which I got immediately, while in Poland I heard that you had to wait, and in my situation, my heart would have stopped (…) but technology and medicine, all that is more advanced than in Poland, I hear from my friends that they waited for this or that. I got it the next day (…) medicine and medication are better (…) our mother would certainly not have lived to 95 in Poland with her lungs, her asthma problems, certainly she would not, here she has the equipment (…) she gets everything.[59]

Moreover, they all emphasise that the prospect of retiring in Germany looks much more attractive due to the healthcare there. Thus, even if someone has returned to Poland, they are still registered in Germany and adopt a strategy of regular trips between the two countries. This compensates for their feeling bad in the new homeland due to a fall in the social hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

The emigration of many Polish citizens was related to legal measures adopted by the Federal Republic of Germany and arrangements made at the highest levels of government. Although the way in which Poles left aroused moral objections and was criticised in Poland, the normalisation treaty and subsequent liberalisation of regulations concerning the granting by the Polish authorities of permission to emigrate, and the availability of passports which facilitated illegal emigration, provided many with the easiest way of getting out of the People's Republic of Poland. However, to make such departures possible, a suitable political atmosphere was needed in both countries, but above all in Germany at the time:

> (…) I came to Germany, I got German papers although I didn't speak German and yet I got the papers. It was a political decision. Such was the atmosphere in Germany then that those who iden-

[58] Interview conducted on 30 April 2015 in F., departure in 1990.
[59] Interview conducted on 9 March 2015 in S., departure in 1978.

> tify with their origin, let's accept them, let's give them money. I got 100 euros… marks as greeting money, *Begrüßungsgeld* as it was called, because that was the political climate then. They wanted to accept all those who were eager to come to Germany. It stopped with the unification of Germany, but that's how it was then. I even think the term *Spätaussiedler* was coined for the needs of this political climate.[60]

This, however, as the interviewee remarks, has changed:

> The climate of such economic hospitality has deteriorated, what the Germans call the *Willkommenskultur*, that is, open arms, come, we welcome you, help you to get started, the benefits are quite generous, abundant and they will allow you to start a new life. I actually benefited from it myself, but it has changed. The jobs market has become much more difficult, the benefits are lower and the opportunities to start a new life are worse than they used to be years ago. And on the other hand, because of my profession, I know that this is related to EU regulations.[61]

For many arrivals, coming face to face with the country that they knew only from stories, letters or short visits was a difficult experience. In turn, the encounter between people with Polish roots living in Germany and the *Aussiedlers* also led to surprise. This issue was discussed by one of the interviewees who was brought up by his father – a displaced person himself – as a Pole, and who, because he knew Polish, made extra money teaching German to the *Aussiedlers*. It came as a shock to him that so many years after the war, people were coming to Germany presenting such documents as military ID or *Volkslisten*, with all their associated symbolism.

Undoubtedly, the influx of so many "German foreigners" was a logistical, social and economic challenge for West Germany. The actions taken by that country at that time provide an important experience which may help to handle challenges related to, for example, the refugee crisis, despite the fact that, as one of the workers in a camp for the resettlers said with disarming sincerity, the forms of integration of *Aussiedlers*, especially young people, were associated with various pedagogical concepts that were popular at that time.

Today it is difficult to reconstruct the full path the *Aussiedlers* had to travel. However, there are still publications in the libraries describing social and integration programmes – for example, through sports activities. This is an important lesson for today's Germany, because immigrants from Poland were one of the fastest integrating or even assimilating groups. This was undoubtedly influenced by cultural proximity and the involvement of many institutions, including the Catholic Church – but this is a topic for a separate study. The fact that Upper Silesians nevertheless tend to distance themselves from the German community may be an important lesson for the Federal Republic of Germany, because they are critical of the state, and – often working in the broad field of medical care – they express opinions that are sometimes very bitter towards that community.

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[60] Interview conducted on 10 March 2015 in K., departure in 1981,born 1956.

[61] *Ibid*.

This example of migration is also important for yet another reason – it shows what influence politicians' decisions have on social and demographic developments in the long term. In this case, it was a mass exodus of people from Poland to Germany, which affected the social structure of both countries. Upper Silesians now living in Germany emigrated for various reasons. The main cause mentioned in the interviews was usually "lack of one thing or another" or an intricate and complicated situation in their place of origin. As one of the interviewees noted – if I had felt good, I wouldn't have left. Did the emigrants get what they had expected when leaving Poland? There is no single answer to this question. It is certain that they now live in a different country from the one they were leaving for, and the country from which they emigrated is now also completely different.

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to present the problems of emigration from Poland to Germany from a historical perspective and in the context of changes that have taken place in both countries. It presents the opinions of people who emigrated to West Germany and obtained Aussiedler status about the changes that have taken place in Germany since they decided to emigrate there from Poland.

The main issue presented in the article is the experiences and views of the individuals in this group, the reasons for their migration, their first encounter with the Federal Republic of Germany, and their opinions about their decision to migrate. In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the opportunity to emigrate from the People's Republic of Poland to West Germany was the dream of many Polish citizens. Such migration was accompanied by great expectations and hopes, which were not fulfilled in the case of all migrants. As in every migration process, there have been winners and losers. The reality of German capitalism, language barriers and unemployment were the most frequent problems encountered by the immigrants.

The paper was written using various qualitative research methods, especially interviews with people who migrated to the Federal Republic of Germany between 1970 and 2000 and obtained Aussiedler status there. This migration has not yet been the subject of an in-depth study in Poland.